# Information for Families:
# Security and Privacy Threats from Internet File-Sharing

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Popular internet file-sharing programs like Kazaa, Morpheus, and Grokster raise several important privacy and security concerns for users.  These concerns include the potential for sharing personal information, problems that may be caused by "spyware" and "adware," and the risk of infection with viruses, worms, and other malicious programs.

Individuals who use file-sharing programs should be aware of several important issues.

- **Spyware and other bundled programs.** File-sharing programs typically come packaged with a number of other programs, including "spyware" and "adware" software that can track your movements over the internet, lead you to receive spam emails, and interfere with the normal function of your computer.

- **Risk of inadvertent sharing of personal information.** Evidence indicates that many users inadvertently share documents containing private information, including tax returns, credit card numbers, medical information, and private communications. This appears to happen because of confusion about the installation and configuration process.

- **Viruses, worms, and other malicious programs.** Experts have said that the use of these programs can introduce viruses and other potentially serious security risks to home computers and networks.  These experts indicate that commercial anti-virus software can provide some protection against these threats for users of file-sharing programs, but are not foolproof.

Some of these problems may arise when parents are unaware of their children's use of file-sharing programs.  Parents who do not wish their children to install such programs can purchase and configure software that can block the use of all file-sharing programs.  A review of the capability of different parental control software programs to block this access is part of the Government Reform Committee's report, *Children's Exposure to Pornography on Peer-to-Peer Networks*, which is available at http://reform.house.gov/min/inves_pornog/index_2003.htm

For more information, here are some web sites that may be of help: GetNetWise (www.getnetwise.org) and NetSmartz (www.netsmartz.org).